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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at a suburban multi-campus community college in southeastern Michigan to determine the differences in demographic and academic characteristics between those students receiving Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (BEOG) and those financially independent students not receiving BEOG funds. The demographic and academic variables considered in the study were age, sex, campus location, program type (i.e., preprofessional, education and business management, secretarial science, technical programs, health programs, and liberal arts), credits attempted, and credits earned. The dependent variables were retention rate and academic progress. During the course of the study, the academic progress of 100 randomly selected BEOG recipients was compared with that of 100 randomly selected self-supporting students for three consecutive semesters: and telephone interviews were conducted with 33 students from the two groups who, during the three semesters, withdrew from college. Major findings indicate that women made up 66% of the BEOG group and 46% of the non-BEOG group, and that BEOG students were younger than their financially independent counterparts. Academic data reveal that the average number of credits carried per semester by the BEOG students was only 7.9, as compared to 11.4 by the independent students. Telephone surveys were completed with five BEOG and seven non-BEOG students, focused on reasons for withdrawal. (JP)

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A STUDY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE BEOG RECIPIENTS

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Introduction

The Basic Educational Opportunity Grant program (BEOG), first authorized in the Education Amendments of 1972 (Public Law 92-318), is today the cornerstone of federal student assistance programs. Building upon the campus-based student aid programs that came into being during President Johnson's war on poverty, the BEOG program, enacted during Nixon's first term, became an entitlement grant to those individuals seeking a postsecondary education whose incomes were low enough to qualify. Eligibility to participate in the BEOG program was the strictest of all federal student aid programs. The grants, limited to one-half the cost of attendance, with a ceiling of $1,400, went primarily to dependent students whose families' incomes averaged well-below $10,000.

As the BEOG program grew in popularity, it became more and more important to community college students, who do not share proportionately in the campus-based student aid programs. Since the BEOG award goes from

the federal contractor (American College Testing Program) directly to the students, community college students were able to utilize the program even if their institutions did not participate in the other federal programs or have a very large student financial aid office. In the 1976-77 academic year alone, over 597,000 students in two-year colleges (both public and private) received about $707,900,000. The average awards were $740 for public community college students and $950 for students attending private two-year colleges. Even more impressive has been the growth of federal outlays for the BEOG program, first appropriated at $122 million in 1973 and expected to reach $3.3 billion in 1979.

Originally, no academic constraints were built into the BEOG program. The grant award, which varied according to the expected amount of the family contribution and the total cost of attending a particular institution, was available to eligible students for a maximum of ten semesters. In 1976, however, Congress amended the legislation to require that "academic progress" be made, as determined by the educational institution, in order for otherwise eligible students to continue to qualify for the BEOG award. This require-

ment puts responsibility on the educational institution to assess, monitor, and keep records of the academic progress made by federally aided BEOG recipients.

This study is an investigation into the progress of BEOG recipients compared to non-assisted students in terms of two dependent measures: (1) retention rates over three semesters for students registered in two-year program (number of students completing all three semesters); and (2) the proportion of credit hours earned to credit hours initially selected for enrollment. This second measure is referred to as academic progress throughout this study. Academic progress assumes each person defines academic goals individually as reflected by the number of credit hours selected by the student. It is then reasonable to assign a measure of progress as the proportion of credits actually earned in a semester relative to those attempted.

Literature Review

In general, it has been difficult to get accurate descriptions of completion rates for community college students. Merrill (1977) found that fewer than one-fifth

of the students in her study received degrees or certificates, but her population included part-time students, which one might predict to have lower completion rates. However, a study by Cope and Hannah (1975) generally supports the completion figures found by Merrill. Cope and Hannah estimate "about two students in ten entering community colleges" complete associate degrees. Neither of these studies controlled for type of financial aid or for BEOG grants.

However, Williams (1977) compared occupational students who were funded under BEOG with financially independent students in two geographically different community colleges, one large urban institution and one small city institution. The BEOG students at one institution in her study differed statistically from the self-supporting student in terms of a lower credit hour rate of progress and in higher number of credit hours dropped. Only in the urban institution included in her study was there a significant difference between the two students groups on credit rate of progress. The small city institution showed no difference between groups on this measure.

It may be that geographical variables make a difference in institutional climate and therefore affect credit hour progress. In the Williams study, among the urban institution BEOG respondents, 14.9% made no academic progress (dropped all credits) compared to 4.2% of the self-supporting students in the same institution. In the small city institution, no students reported dropping all credits in any one term; however, 10.7% of the BEOG students in the small city community college reported dropping 6-11 hours in the term,compared to only 4.0% of self-supporting students who dropped 6-11 hours. On the 6-11 hours dropped, the two institutions are almost identical. Williams also found the two community colleges to be different on enrollment figures over three successive semesters; the small city college had 75% continuous enrollment compared to 41% continuous enrollment for the urban college. Since these figures are for occupational students only, the sample is not comparable to this study under investigation which uses a random sample of students, but the above figures do suggest broad differences among BEOG students at different institutions.

Since the institution in this study has only 10% of its students on BEOG grants and is geographically suburban, the progress measures and retention rates may be quite different from other institutions in different locations.

Sampling Strategy

One hundred BEOG recipients and 100 self-supporting students were selected randomly from all students who were entering freshmen in the fall, 1976 and were enrolled in a two-year program. The institution is a suburban multi-campus community college in southeastern Michigan. Ten percent of all students at this institution (head count) are BEOG recipients. A stratified random sample of 100 BEOG and 100 non-BEOG students was drawn upon which to do the analyses. The method which was used was to select every twentieth student from the non-BEOG student sample, and every third BEOG student from the BEOG student sample. Three semesters used for retention outcome measure are Fall, 1976; Winter, 1977; and Fall, 1977. We excluded the summer semester as probably atypical of regular enrollment patterns. The student sample groups will also

be described by age, sex, campus location and program type. Programs were collapsed to generate five areas of study: (1) preprofessional including law enforcement, education and business management; (2) secretarial science; (3) technical programs; (4) health programs, and (5) liberal arts.

Findings: Demographic Variables

There is a significant difference in age between BEOG recipients and non-BEOG students with the latter group averaging 25.4 years and BEOG students 22.7. ($F= 5.9840$, $P=.0153$) However, there is a bias operating here. BEOG eligibility is slanted toward the younger, dependent student living with parents. It's more difficult for independent students (those supporting themselves) to qualify in the first place. Also there is a significant difference in the proportion of males and females who are BEOG and the non-BEOG students as indicated in Table 1.

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY SEX BY BEOG AND INDEPENDENT STATUS BY PERCENT

Student Status	Male*	Female*	Totals
BEOG recipient	34%	66%	= 100%
Non-BEOG	54%	46%	= 100%

*x^2=8.1169, P=.0044

Looking at the male-female difference in student financial aid status, almost twice as many women have BEOG grants as compared to men. Women make up 66% of the BEOG sample group, but only 46% of control group.

By program, BEOG students are overrepresented in secretarial science which probably attracts women on the basic grant since the skills learned can provide immediate jobs. Other distribution by program is illustrated in Table 2.

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION BY PROGRAM BY BEOG, OR INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL STATUS, BY NUMBERS OF STUDENTS

Programs N=200	All	BEOG*	Inde-* pend-ent
Preprofessional	34	20	14
Secretarial Science	15	13	2
Technical Programs	16	5	11
Health Programs	13	8	5
Liberal Arts	122	54	68
Totals	200	100	100

*X^2=13.674, P=.0084)

All programs show significant differences between numbers of BEOG students and non-BEOG students. Further investigation is needed to determine why so many students are enrolled in liberal arts programs. It may be that most of those students intend to transfer to four-year institutions and are taking general education requirements at the community college. Or it could be that students must take some general education courses before applying to

a career program which may mean that a number of these "liberal arts" students are working to meet entrance requirements into a career program.

Distribution of BEOG students by campus show significant differences at three centers, probably due in part to the diversity of income differences within this very high income county (Table 3).

TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS BY CAMPUS BY BEOG AND INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL STATUS BY NUMBERS

Campus	All	BEOG*	Independent*
North	63	26	37
West	26	13	13
Central	72	33	39
Southeast	39	28	11

* (x^2=9.8309, p=.0201)

TABLE 4

DISTRIBUTION OF NUMBERS OF CREDITS REGISTERED FOR BY BEOG AND INDEPENDENT STUDENTS FOR FALL, 1976 BY PERCENT

	BEOG	Independent
Registered for less than 6 credits	3%	33%
6 or more credits	97%	67%
Average number of credits registered for*	7.9	11.4

* ($F=40.220$, $p= <.0001$)

There is a difference in the two student populations in Fall, 1976, as far as credits registered for (Table 4). This does not seem to affect academic progress for a given semester but a cumulative effect may result in significant differences over the academic career of a student. For Fall, 1976, there is no correlation between credits registered for and credits completed for (1) all students,

(2) BEOG students, or (3) non-BEOG students.

Dependent Variables

Retention rate variable is defined as the proportion of students who earn credits in each of the three semesters under study; Table 5.

TABLE 5

DISTRIBUTION OF RETENTION RATES OVER THREE SEMESTERS BY STUDENT GROUP, BEOG STUDENTS AND INDEPENDENT STUDENTS BY PERCENT

Retention Rates	All	BEOG	Non-Assisted
3 semesters	75	42%	33%
Less than 3 semesters	125	58%	67%
Totals	200	100%	100%

NS=no significant difference

There is no significant difference in the proportion of BEOG and the control group earning credits in all three semesters. But it is important

to note that the BEOG students are persevering in higher proportions than other students even with a higher percentage of grant students registering for more credit hours than non-assisted students. An analysis of retention rates by programs showed no significant differences between BEOG students and non-assisted students in any program.

Academic progress variable is defined as the percentage of the total credits earned of the total credits registered for initially. For Fall, 1976, Table 6 shows the mean percentage of completion for the total sample N=200. There is no statistically significant difference between the two student groups. The BEOG students had a 62.3% mean rate of progress while non-assisted students had a 71.4% mean rate of completion.

TABLE 6

DISTRIBUTION OF MEAN RATE OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS FOR BEOG STUDENTS AND INDEPENDENT STUDENTS BY PERCENT, FALL, 1976

Academic Progress	All	BEOG	Non-assisted
Fall 1976 N=200	66.9%	62.3%	71.4%

No significant difference.

For the third semester, Fall, 1977, no significant differences between the two student types appear on the academic progress measure with an N=85. Table 7 shows that BEOG students have a mean percentage of 60% while non-assisted students have a mean percentage of 64% on academic progress.

TABLE 7

DISTRIBUTION OF MEAN RATE OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS FOR BEOG AND INDEPENDENT STUDENTS BY PERCENT FOR FALL, 1977

Academic Progress	All	BEOG	Non-assisted
Fall, 1977 N=85	61.9%	60.0%	64%

No significant difference

However, looking at incompletes for the two student groups for Fall, 1976, a significant difference appears (p=.0206) on number of students taking incompletes. While one in five BEOG students took an incomplete, only one in ten non-assisted students did so. The sample size is N=200 for this semester. In the following semester, Winter, 1977, the significant difference holds (p=.0140). During this term,

one in four BEOG students took an incomplete while one in ten non-assisted students did so. The sample size has dropped to N=135. During the third semester, eighty-five students are still enrolled and no significant difference appears among the two groups. Each group now has a ratio of 1:5. More non-assisted students now take an incomplete while the remaining BEOG students maintain a stable ratio. During the first two semesters of the study twice as many BEOG students took incompletes as did independent students. This might be a function of the higher credit load for many BEOG students or be due to academic problems or personal problems for BEOG students. This area needs more investigation to determine which variables are related to degrees of academic progress and to plan for more support services if needed for BEOG students.

Finally, on a cumulative scale, measuring academic

progress for all three semesters (total number of credits earned as a percentage of total credits registered for), there is a significant difference between the Basic Grant students and non-assisted students, Table 8.

TABLE 8

DISTRIBUTION OF MEAN RATE OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS OVER THREE SEMESTERS FOR BEOG STUDENTS AND INDEPENDENT STUDENTS BY PERCENT

Cumulative	All	BEOG*	Independent*
Academic Progress	74.2%	69.0%	80.7%
(N)	(75)	(42)	(33)

*(F=4.4273, p=.0388)

These figures speak very well for the students in the Basic Grant program since the mean rate of completion for them is almost 70% of those who persevered over three semesters. The cumulative academic progress measure includes forty-two Basic Opportunity students and only thirty-three of the control group who took classes all three semesters. In addition we might expect the BEOG students to be financially disadvantaged

compared to non-assisted students because of the high mean income in the county. Yet they are persevering in their studies to a remarkable degree. Part of the cumulative academic progress difference may be related to one program area where BEOG students and non-assisted students have significantly different rates of academic progress. In the preprofessional program including law enforcement, education, business management, the BEOG mean rate of progress is 63.5% while the independent student rate is 96.3% (Significant difference, $F=18.044$, $p=.0004$). No other program revealed significant differences on academic progress by student type.

The second half of this study discusses the results of interviews with students in both groups to investigate the reasons for attrition.

PART II: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

Of the thirty-three student names and telephone numbers given to the researchers, sixteen students either were no longer living at the number in their file or the number had been disconnected. Four were not at home after repeated calls, and one student

refused to participate in the survey. The number of respondents then was twelve, or 36% of the sample, which included seven women and five men. Five respondents were BEOG recipients.

Demographics

Of the women respondents, four are single, two are married, and one was formerly married. The latter three had an average of three children. Three of the men are married with children, two are single. Of all respondents, seven attended North, three at Central, one at West, and one from Southeast (codes for individual campuses). All respondents are residents of the county in which the college is located. Seven of these surveyed intended to return to the college in the near future.

Results

All respondents indicated that their decision to attend college was very important or somewhat important to their life goals. Very important reasons for the decision to attend college were, in order of numerical importance from student responses:

(A) personal development
(B) occupational upgrading
(C) preparation for an intended career or occupation
(D) transfer preparation.

Of those who indicated they will not return to the college under study, one transferred to another institution and finished the program, one opened his own business, one needed to learn Spanish which he did for job upgrading, one was a student at another Michigan institution and took a course in art history to prepare for a trip to Europe, and one indicated disappointment in the program due to the inconvenient time journalism courses were taught from that student's perspective.

Dissatisfactions listed by those who will not return to the institution were classroom instruction (2)*, courses offerings (2), vocational/career counseling (1), intelligence of fellow students (2), class scheduling (1). Those who listed the most dissatisfactions were married women from high income areas in the county who were not employed outside the home.

Of those who planned to return to the college under study, fewer dissatisfactions were noted. Four were satisfied in every respect with the academic

*Frequency of responses.

program and related areas. The three remaining were all dissatisfied with classroom instruction, and with academic counseling. Two were dissatisfied with informal contact with instructors, two with academic skill services and one with class scheduling. The criticisms came from students attending North and West campuses. Two said the challenge of the coursework was overwhelming and they had no personal encouragement to continue. Yet all of these students intended to return in the near future.

Of those who expressed satisfaction, all made new friends who were fellow students. Of those who expressed dissatisfactions only half had made new friends among other students.

Since all of the respondents had dropped out or stopped out from college, they were asked to give the important reasons for this decision. (See questionnaire for categories.) More than one response was possible. In order of frequency of respondents for a given response, the reasons for leaving were the following:

(1) Found the studies to be too time consuming (6)
(2) Disappointed in the program of studies (6)
(3) Transferred to another college (3)
(4) Wanted to seek immediate employment (3)
(5) General discouragement with school (2)
(6) Financial problems (2)
(7) Found studies to be more difficult than anticipated (2)
(8) Completed the program/courses (2)
(9) Illness (1)

BEOG Recipients

Five of the respondents were Basic Educational Opportunity Grant students. Four out of the five intend to return to the institution for further study. The one who is not returning is planning to move to British Columbia. Two of the five students indicated that the course work was too difficult and they found little encouragement to continue. Four of the five indicated the studies to be too time consuming and two had financial problems. There were differences in the BEOG students and the others in the study on reasons for leaving or stopping out; only BEOG students mentioned difficulty with course work as a reason for leaving and only BEOG students gave financial problems as a reason. Twice as many BEGO students mentioned that studies were too time consuming which may be related to the difficulty

of course work they expressed. There were no differences between the two groups on reasons for decision to attend college.

Four out of five, or 80% of BEOG students, expressed dissatisfactions with academic program and related areas as compared with four out of seven, or 57%, of the non-BEOG respondents.

Summary

The results of this study reemphasize the diversity of academic programs and student clientele to which the community colleges must respond. Since the community colleges serve the communities in which they exist, the attitudes, values, and needs of the community will be reflected in the programs offered by the community colleges. Williams's (1977) study pointed out differences between community colleges existing in two different settings, i.e., urban and non-urban settings. Since the study presented herein included only one suburban community college, the results cannot be generalized to other community college settings.

This study does show that BEOG recipients at the community college involved in the study differ from

the non-BEOG student group as far as age, sex, chosen academic program, academic center attended, and number of academic credit hours for which they register. Since this group of students is demographically different from other students, academic administrators perhaps should consider their needs when community college policies are developed and academic decisions are made.

The study revealed that there were no differences in the retention rate between the two groups of students which had been randomly selected. There was a significant difference in the academic progress made by the BEOG students as compared to the non-BEOG students. Several reasons for the lower BEOG student's academic progress over the three semesters studied were discussed, including a greater number of credits were registered for by the BEOG students as well as the differences in the proportions of students in the five academic programs presented.

The attempt to contact the students who had stopped attending the community college was difficult due to the mobility of the students. The responses of the twelve students who were contacted can only

be used to indicate future areas of study; obviously no conclusions could be made from such a small sample. The results of the telephone interviews do demonstrate the diversity of interests, needs, and abilities of the students. Some students were able to meet their academic needs without completing their academic programs; others found the work either not challenging enough or too difficult, and others found that other social, psychological, or financial needs had to be met before they could continue their academic work.

This study presents a methodology to study the success of students who have been able to continue their education largely due to the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant program. The study describes the establishment of criteria for the evaluation of the success: academic retention and academic progress. These variables, which have been included in the evaluation model, may be used to study the success of BEOG students in a variety of community college settings.

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